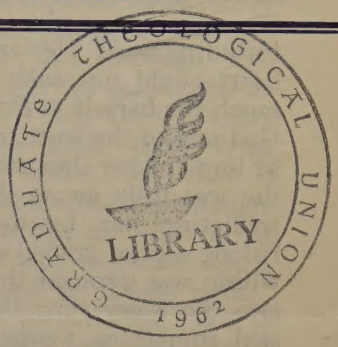
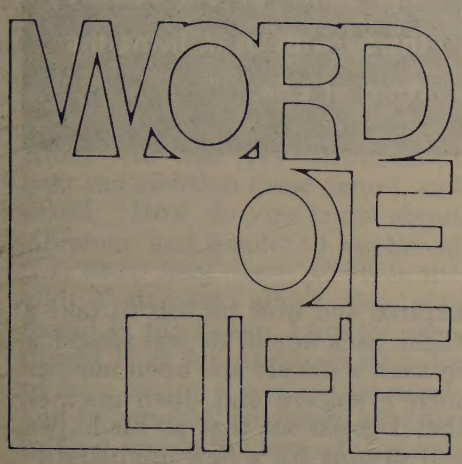
Living City

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 3 SUPPLEMENT

MAY - 0 1979





"Seek first his kingship over you,
his way of holiness,
and all these things
will be given you besides."
(Matthew 6:33)

MAY 1979

The whole Gospel is a revolution. Not one of Christ's words is similar to the words of men. Listen to this: "*Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things* (the necessities of life) *will be given you besides*" *(Mt. 6:33).*

Usually a person's first concern is to anxiously seek what is necessary to give security to his or her existence. Perhaps this is true for you, too. If it is, then Jesus puts before you his way of seeing things and shows you his way of doing them. He asks of you a behavior which is totally different from your usual way of behaving and he wants you to live it not just once, but always. It is this. Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness.

When all of your being will be projected in God and you will do everything so that he reigns within you and in the others (that is, that you govern your life according to his laws) then the Father will give you whatever you need day by day.

If, instead, you worry first of all about yourself, you will end up by being concerned with the things of this world and fall victim to them. You will end up seeing the goods of this world as your real problem, and the goal of all your efforts. You will harbor in your heart the dangerous temptation to rely exclusively on your own strength and fail to turn to God.

"*Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides*" *(Mt. 6:33).*

Jesus turns the situation upside down. If your first concern will be him, to live for him, then all the rest will no longer be the main concern of your existence, but only something "extra" or "added."

Is this a utopia? Are they words that you, the modern man or woman, cannot possibly live in today's industrialized world dominated by competition and plagued by economic crisis?

I simply want to remind you that the concrete difficulties of subsistence were no less acute for the people of Galilee at the time when Jesus spoke these words.

It is not a question of a utopia or not. Jesus places you before the basic principle of your life: either you live for yourself or you live for God.

Let us try now to understand these words really well, "*Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides*" *(Mt. 6:33).*

Jesus does not exhort you to be aloof and passive in regard to the things of this earth or to assume an irresponsible and superficial conduct in your work.

Jesus wants to change your "preoccupation" into "occupation," taking away your anxiety, fear and restlessness.

He says, in fact, "*Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness . . .*" *(Mt. 6:33).*

The words "seek first" mean before everything else. Seeking his kingship, his way of holiness should be given the first place and this does not exclude the fact that a Christian must also take care of obtaining the necessities of his or her life.

To "seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness" means that one must live in conformity with God's demands as expressed by Jesus in his Gospel.

Only by seeking the kingdom of God will the Christian experience God's marvelous power in his or her favor.

Let me tell you about something that happened.

It took place some time ago, yet it is valid also for today. In fact, I know many girls and boys who act today in the same way as did the girl I am going to tell you about.

Her name is Elvira. She went to a teacher's college. She was poor. Only her good grades made it possible for her to continue her studies. She had a very strong faith. Her philosophy teacher was an atheist and quite often he presented truths about Christ and the Church in an unclear, if not distorted, manner. Her ardent young heart could not take it— not so much for herself as for her love of God and of the truth, and also out of love for her classmates. Though she was fully aware that by contradicting her teacher she was risking a poor grade, what she felt within was stronger than anything else. So every time the professor said something wrong, she raised her hand asking to speak up. "It's not true, professor," she used to say. Perhaps, at times, she did not have all the answers to disprove his arguments, but behind her words, "It's not true," there was all the power of her faith which was a gift of truth and makes one think.

Elvira's classmates, who loved her very much, tried to dissuade her from interrupting so as not to jeopardize her grades. It was to no avail.

A few months later it was time for report cards. Elvira took her report card trembling. Then suddenly a shout of joy. She got an "A" in philosophy, the highest possible grade.

She had been seeking God first, and that his truth should reign before everything else, and the rest came to her in abundance.

"Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness and all these things will be given you besides" (Mt. 6:33).

If you, too, will seek the kingdom of the Father, you will experience that God is Providence for the necessities of your life. You will discover the extraordinary, yet normal, truth of the Gospel.

Chiara Lubich

WORD OF LIFE
JUNE 1979

"Stand firm, because this is how you will save yourselves."

(Luke 21:19)

EXPERIENCES

Each month a "Word of Life" appears in Living City or in its Supplement. The following are experiences that some of our readers shared with us in living the Word of Life.

A LONG DELAY

The airport was crowded in Rome. I was returning home after almost three weeks which were beautiful in many ways. I checked in most of my luggage, keeping only a small brief case containing some reading material for the eight hour trip back to New York.

As I walked towards my departure gate I heard messages in Italian, then in English. My flight was to be delayed for almost two hours. While I waited in the boarding area, I realized that I could make a small act of love for someone by offering my seat. In that same moment, I overheard someone say aloud: "I wish I could just sit down." I caught her attention and told her I was leaving. She smiled and the faces of many near us seemed to light up a bit. Love had entered.

After a short walk I found a section where there were many empty seats. As I waited there a young man sat down next to me and began to tell me his story.

His name was Mohammed F. He was about twenty five years old, and he spoke English very well. He was an engineer and highly skilled in the production of honey and other agricultural products. He had hoped to travel to a country different from his own and to obtain the necessary visa in Italy.

Here his story and his way of telling the story was full of anguish and frustration. He was delayed for such a long time in waiting for the visa, that his visa to Italy had expired and now he had to take a flight back home. He was speaking in such a sincere and open manner such a sincere and open manner that I could see that all his hopes and dreams for a new life had disappeared. In returning home he was without a job, and without the large savings that he spent on the airline tickets, and his stay in Rome for two weeks.

When Mohammed first began speaking to me I remember thinking to myself that this person is "my neighbor" and therefore, I must love him, since Jesus himself commanded us to love one another. In the beginning this meant to listen to Mohammed as he told me his story. Then I began to see in his eyes a deep frustration, a feeling of being alone and abandoned. I understood that before me was a person who was suffering. I had realized then that to love this neighbor, I should make myself one with him in order to better understand his situation and therefore be able to share this suffering with him. I began to ask him questions about some of the aspects of his problem. There didn't seem to be any alternative for him, except to return home. This idea really made his suffering more acute. It meant facing his family, his father and brother in particular whose money he had borrowed in order to make this trip.

I wanted to make my love for Mohammed concrete, but it was difficult to think and discover

what I could give him. I soon realized that the most beautiful possession I had was the ideal that fills my life, that is the gospel put into practice in unity. I thought of the story of the prodigal son, but I was certain that Mohammed was a Moslem and therefore wouldn't be familiar with the story. Then I asked Mohammed if he was a Moslem. He answered, yes. Then, almost without even thinking, I said to him, do you remember the story of Abraham and Sarah. He was very surprised to hear me mention these names, and asked, "How do you know about Abraham and Sarah?" I explained that there were many points in the Old Testament which are also found in the Koran. I briefly mentioned that for Abraham all hope of ever having a son had vanished, and he was old. However, his faith in God and in the love of God had remained and God found Abraham's faith strong, and as a result, Abraham became the father of many nations.

Suddenly Mohammed's expression changed. He said: "You are right." He then explained that when he first arrived in Italy he had been reading the Koran every day. But, when the difficulties with the visa started, he no longer read the Koran. The realization of this other reality, the love of God in all aspects of life, seemed to reverse the situation completely.

Mohammed smiled for the first time. He began to tell me about his village at home where he and his family lived. He even joked about his past two weeks in Italy saying that the food was not to his liking and he began, in a sense the month-long fast ahead of schedule.

Without realizing the time I turned to look at the boarding area where the people for my flight had been waiting. The last person was just going through the door. Mohammed and I exchanged expressions of peace. I entered the plane richer than I could imagine.

J. W.

"LOOK DAD"

I guess ever since I considered myself an adult, about the time I got out of college, I'd been pretty well brainwashed, that one stepped right out of college onto the success road. I had reached that point. But as I began my career, I didn't see the success.

Then I was introduced to looking at the Gospel and Christ's message to us, the Word of Life, and it became clearer and clearer that there was the success road that we need. I soon saw that it has to be lived. But in trying, I found out that in order to live it, you have to completely forget yourself. And I found out too, that the situations when I need to forget myself the most are when I'm angry. It isn't too difficult for me to get up in the morning and be cheerful and pleasant. But it's different later in the day, when I run into a situation where I get angry, when the only thing that matters to me is what I think or care about or think has to be done.

The situation that I want to share with you today occurred one day when I came home from work. The garage door was open, and I decided to walk into the house through the garage. As I entered the garage, I saw my toolbox open and a trail of tools leading into the house. As I went into the anteroom leading into the house, there was one of my daughters. She had pounded a nail through two boards, through the carpet and into the floor. I was already angry because my tools were lying around, and when I saw that, it was just about the end. This daughter looked up at me with a big smile on her face and said "Look, Dad, I learned to pound nails!" I knew in an instant that I had to forget my anger and my concern about where the tools belonged and what was happening to the floor, that I couldn't destroy her joy. In that instant I thought of Christ's words, "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12), and I forgot myself in the situation. And I'm glad. Instead, I smiled and said, "That's good. It's nice." After that, I did ask her to pick up the tools and put them away when she was finished.

J. K.

THE RIGHT APPROACH

I am a priest and often I am tempted to get discouraged when I begin to think of so many people that seem totally indifferent to God. I have been searching for a solution to this problem of mine. I remembered Jesus' words 'ask and you will receive' and asked him to open my eyes to a more optimistic and hope-filled approach in my parish work.

Quite unexpectedly the Lord gave me a glimpse of a solution the other night. It came as a result of an experience I had in going over to a home to give a pre-baptism instruction. We had previously agreed on the baptism meeting but I called ahead to remind them that I would be coming over. I could tell from the rather hostile tone in the father's question that it could be a difficult meeting. He asked, "Why does there have to be a baptism instruction?".....Here was the kind of parishioner who could get me discouraged by his attitude.

As I drove over to the house, I had to tell myself I have to approach this man in the right way, otherwise this meeting will be useless. I have to love also in this situation. What would I be like if I were in his shoes? "Do for others just what you want them to do for you" (Luke 6:31).

The street was very dark and I couldn't read the numbers on the houses very well. I stood there at the gate while the dog barked at me from inside the yard. A light went on inside the house, then it went off again. I asked myself, "How do I know that this is the right house? They don't open the door." I decided to go back to the rectory and call again. Once again I heard the rather unfriendly voice on the phone telling me, "You were here why didn't you come in?" I explained about the darkness and the dog. I drove back to their home, this time they opened the door and came out to hold the dog so he wouldn't bite. As we started talking, the father continued to half watch TV. He asked a question about the Church in a rather unfriendly way, he also said he went to church when he was a child. "Then you don't go to church, how come?", I asked. He said it was because the Church was not the same because of all the changes. I explained to him that he would be the same person even with a change in clothes, that he was the same person who changed in growing up, that family life has changed, and other examples. I could tell that the man's attitude was changing even as we talked. In fact, at one point he burst out in laughter at an example I gave. It even surprised me to see his attitude change so much. Since I was open to him, I learned something from him too.

As I got back into the car and was about to leave, the thought suddenly came to me that somehow the Lord had taught me something in this experience. I could not pinpoint the answer but it was like a new awareness that those who don't seem at first to be concerned about the things of God, can be more open to God than one might at first expect.

In my heart I felt an indescribable joy!

T. E.

Vita has left us

On Wednesday, February 21st, due to an accident which took place in Grottaferrata (near Rome) Vitaliano Bulletti, (known to us as "Vita" — which means life) a very dear friend who for many years bore a limpid testimony to the life of the Gospel, died at the age of 51.

He was one of the first focolarini and at the time of his death he held a position of responsibility within the Movement. We found great peace in our deep sorrow for his sudden disappearance, remembering his consistency in confronting daily his own actions with the will of God, and knowing of the great love he always had for all. We feel certain that he has reached that Life to which we are all called.

In the next issue of Living City we will publish an article about his Christian experience which started in 1949 and made him leave everything in order to be totally at the service of God and humanity.

We would like to inform our readers that a Focolare Center has now been opened in Los Angeles, California. The address is:

Focolare Movement
P.O. Box 71701
Los Angeles, California 90071

Room for joy

The son of an ambassador, Jean Vanier entered the Canadian Navy at the age of thirteen, and came out thirteen years later, in 1950, "to follow Jesus," as he himself put it. At that time he did not know what that would mean. At first he lived in a christian community of students in Paris. Then he spent two years at Fatima, after which he prepared his doctorate on Aristotle, and from 1962 taught philosophy at Toronto. It was there that he found himself in contact with mentally handicapped people. He decided to live together with some of them and in 1964 founded the first l'Arche community at Compiegne, near Paris. "It wasn't a choice, it was saying 'yes' to an adventure that was unfolding before me." This article was originally published in French in Nouvelle Cite', Paris.

by Alain Sauret

L'Arche community, which began ten years ago, is now found in eleven countries, including India and the Ivory Coast. It prints its own magazine, addressed to the "friends and relations of handicapped or subnormal children", called "Ombres et Lumieres" — (Light and Shade) run by Marie-Helene Mathieu. It comes out every three months and has a circulation of 20 thousand. A very original venture, l'Arche tries not so much to eliminate the chronic defects of the mentally handicapped person, as to put a stop to his victimization by a society which rejects him. For this purpose little centers came into being where handicapped people not only find a real family, but begin to become more a part of normal society. At l'Arche the words "abnormal" and "subnormal" no longer have any meaning.

We asked Jean Vanier several questions about his courageous venture:

How did l'Arche community begin?

In 1964 I was teaching philosophy in Canada, and almost by chance I found myself in contact with mentally handicapped adults. I say handicapped which is different from mentally ill. They are people who, either from childhood or as adults, have had an illness or an accident which has impaired their intelligence. In order to get to know them better I worked with them in a specialized institute where some of them were employed on a building site. There I discovered their great simplicity and willingness and, at the same time, their need for affection and understanding.

Then I tried to find out about their position in the world — how many there were of them, where they were to be found, and how they were usually treated. I discovered that many of them are shut up in great big psychiatric hospitals, or isolated in their homes, over-protected by their parents who are ashamed of them and are afraid of letting them be seen by other people.

In that way I became acquainted with the world of the outcast in which handicapped people live. They are rarely treated as people and in most cases are classified as backward, deficient and perhaps even dangerous individuals whom it is necessary to keep at arm's length. This is the great suffering of a handicapped person; he feels himself shunned, and always hears himself called abnormal. Wherever he goes he sees everyone turning the other way! The most serious thing is not being handicapped, but always being refused by others. The feeling of being set on one side is the true tragedy of the handicapped person, and is the cause of later psychological disturbances.

I took two handicapped people with me, who had been shut up in a mental home, and we set up a flat on the outskirts of the city of Compiegne. We cooked togehter. We dug the garden. We lived together.

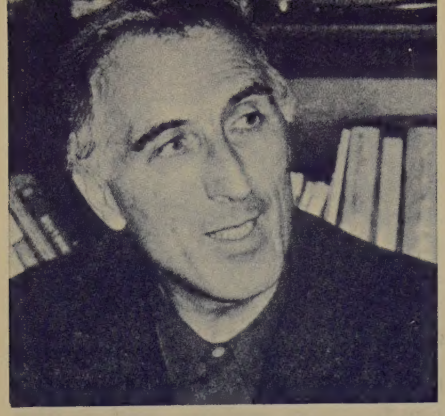
People came to help me and so I was able to get other handicapped people out of the hospital. And little by little the project developed. L'Arche was born.

What does the name "Arche" mean?

It is the name of the first community, and it is also the name of the various centers which have developed after the experiment started at Compiegne. At the moment at Compiegne we have fifteen houses spread over a radius of twenty-five miles. It is our most important center. Each of these centers may consist of one or more houses, in which from five to ten people live. Obviously in these tiny communities there is no distinction between the handicapped people and the others. This is the originality of l'Arche. The word "Arche" also means the whole movement of sympathy and help which has grown up around the handicapped people. There are now about fifty communities around the world.

Why was this name chosen?

There were three reasons. "L'Arche" is a French word which means Ark and makes you think straightaway of Noah's ark and the flood. Our civilization, with



JEAN VANIER
". . . the outcast is a prophetic figure . . ."

represents God for us in our terms, its changes, its organization of life, and its work rhythms is indeed a sort of flood for those on the fringes, the weak, the uncertain. Handicapped people in particular are left on one side by this technological civilization and are easily exposed to nervous breakdowns. We want l'Arche to be a refuge for them. In French the word also reminds us of the ark of the Covenant between God and the Hebrew people, when he freed them from slavery. When handicapped people are discarded by society, they see every possibility of progress closed to them, and their freedom and respect as persons are denied. They are in fact in a position of slavery. In l'Arche they begin to hope again, and find a new life for themselves.

What is your criterion for admission of handicapped people to l'Arche?

Usually we take handicapped people who live in the vicinity of one of our existing communities and who have no family. We look for the poorest, the most abandoned, the ones who really need us. However, for the moment we do not take in the more severely handicapped, since we are still at the early stages of this new experiment. But we hope in the future to be able to open our centers to those who have most need.

What results has l'Arche achieved so far?

It is difficult to answer a question of that sort because we are not aiming at results, so much as giving these handicapped people the right to live like anyone else. And this happens first of all inside the community itself, and then again on each occasion that a handicapped person is able to leave us, because he is fully reintegrated into society. It happens when one of them finds a job or forms a family. However, each time that one of them leaves us, it is a sorrow for the other members of the community, because within it great intimacy is created and each departure is the departure of a friend. Perhaps the most significant moments in our experience have been when a handicapped person has left us to start another Arche community. In France this has happened several times, and there are at the moment three communities run, in fact, by one or other of them.

You mentioned others who have helped you. In what way are your helpers linked to you?

There are no juridical links between us. We are neither an order, nor a religious congregation. Any juridical link would only bring up again the status of the handicapped person and would necessarily lead to his being outcast. We are lay people, single or married, linked by a common interest for the poorest people, and in particular, obviously, for those mentally handicapped. Consequently we form a large community. We meet periodically to pool our experiences, and formulate the most significant lines which are emerging from our daily contact with these people who are usually so isolated.

Do these isolated people have something to teach, something to contribute, in building our society?

Indisputably! Every outcast, whether he is a prisoner, a tramp or a handicapped person, is isolated because he reminds people of their own weaknesses, and everyone has difficulty in accepting his own weaknesses. In addition, he puts us in contact with death, because he demonstrates the precariousness of both physical and spiritual life. And since we have difficulty accepting our poverty, and the precariousness of our life, we try to push into the background those people who are unable to be successful in life, and at the same time we take refuge in riches, either material or intellectual, the acquisition of goods, fashion, great abstract plans, and intellectualism. The outcast, on the other hand, is a permanent invitation to discover the presence of death within us. The only way to really accept death is to believe in the resurrection. By doing this we suddenly enter the world of the beatitudes shown to us by Jesus, the world of love.

I must believe that in spite of all my physical and intellectual weaknesses, God loves me. Jesus loves me and calls me to life, and gives me his spirit to live a life of love.

I am always surprised at the way in which those who work among prisoners and outcasts become transformed, after a time, by the outcasts themselves. Since the outcast is a prophetic figure, he brings us face to face with the absurdity of suffering and compels us to make a choice. Faced by a prisoner, a blind man, or any handicapped person, there are two possible attitudes: rejection or acceptance. Either our attitude is one of fear, or one of attention, interest, and openness. Our contacts with other people in society, tinged as they are with compromise, do not demand such a deep change inside. We must therefore open ourselves, not to a theory of the poor, nor to a policy for the poor, but to the poor themselves. Those who listen, meet, and lay themselves open to the poor, as a consequence also open themselves to God. ■

The secret of life

by Igino Giordani

Christians may appear to be lowly insignificant creatures when compared with the large mass of violent, showy people. But Christians are in fact ambitious people who are set on sublimating their own shortcomings in order to replace them with the power of God: they no longer live because they allow Christ to live in them. Christians who are aware of the essence of their faith achieve human fulfillment with the power of grace, and they do so quietly and without publicity. They do not renounce, they conquer: they are life producing cells in a poisoned body. With the dignity which is theirs as the brothers of Christ they bring the world the divine food of love. They bring love to those impoverished of love, they bring love to those who wage wars in an inhuman fashion because they lack love. Love is the expression of divine intelligence. There is fear when you do not love and if you do not recognize your fellow men as your brothers there is hunger, jealousy and despair. The world is becoming an icy waste and we are dying in the cold and grinding our teeth because we have lost the secret of life which is love. The time we spend in not loving is time spent in dying because we pass from death to life if we love our brothers as ourselves; since we ourselves have been made one with Jesus, we love our brothers as Jesus. This is how our Father loves each man, one by one.

Following these directives, the Focolarini, like all communities directed to Christ, become powerful furnaces which burn hatred and reveal the secret of life, the elixir of eternal youth, which is joy. The new commandment is made for everyone. Through love they make themselves one with their neighbor so as to be one with God. These 'young people' who share in the youth of the Eternal God, rejoice in living the communion of the Church and rejoice in being the Mystical Body in action. Although we are sinful mortal creatures, through grace and the teaching of Jesus handed down by the Church we can live in a human and divine reality which is rich in joy: creatures and Creator share a common life. This is a source of invincible power, of superhuman dignity; Christians freely commit themselves to serve as he served, to the extent of giving his life. They serve each brother who is next to them in each moment. Those who accept this ideal do not want any soul to pass by them in vain. Whoever meets them should experience that warmth which is the spirit of God.

Human society in this way can become a faithful projection of the reality of the Man-God. Human life is accompanied by divine life; man collaborates with God. If he who is Life reigns on earth, then we live on earth as it is in heaven. We are invited to immerse ourselves in the community, to lose ourselves in our brother. If we refuse then we are like someone trying to sing a solo when they are invited to join a choir. If we prefer to defend our own ascetical life and feel superior to others we miss the opportunity to share our spirit in the invisible arteries of the one mystical body; we do not allow ourselves to become, mystically, the blood of Christ.

Community life is built up when the barriers between man and man are removed; whether they are called individualism, selfishness or pluralism is not important. The 'fire' of community life burns this dross and unites us in a solid equality in the knowledge that we are created for one another and that our progress towards God is conditioned by the degree of our solidarity with our brothers. There is strength in unity. Unity inspires us to renounce ourselves so as to become the other: Jew with a Jew, Greek with a Greek, Carmelite with a Carmelite. Esprit de corps, which exists even in certain religious communities, is banished by the spirit of the mystical body which gives a universal spirit to life in society. We converge towards the one God: the scattered children return to their father's home.

Religion is ever-present. We are always in church. God is present everywhere, and happiness lies for us in loving him everywhere. There is paradise where he is, and on his account our workshop, office, or school becomes a temple.

Whoever is on their own is not alone: God is with them. If we love him, we can see him in nature, in the sun, in the wind, in art, in machines, indeed in every manifestation of his imagination and power. We can see the father in our brother even if he is a prisoner, a bandit or a leper. We abhor prison and oppose violence and we treat the leprosy, but we love the person concerned because God has made us his children and so we are brothers and sisters. Our brother

represents God for us in our terms, so that in loving and serving him, we finite beings can learn to understand the infinite being. Every relationship we have with our brother, whether it is in our office, or in our business world, or in political action, is a tribute of love for our brother, a relationship of charity. The Holy Spirit circulates, and "the life of the Spirit exists only where the unity of love exists." (1)

(1) Cardinal Poma, Inaugural address to the "Evangelization and Promotion" Congress in Rome, 1976.

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1979 MARIAPOLIS

SOUTHWEST

Place:	New Mexico Highlands University Las Vegas, New Mexico	
Date:	**June 24, after supper** **June 30, after breakfast**	
Registration Fee:	Single persons	U.S.$ 25.00
	Married couples	U.S.$ 30.00

No registration fee for young people up to 18 years of age.
The registration fee is not included in the accommodation fee.

Accommodations: (meals and lodgings)		
	Adults	**U.S.$120.00**
	Children (from 3 to 12 years)	**U.S.$ 60.00**

NORTHWEST

Place:	St. Martin's College – Lacey, Washington	
Date:	**July 22, after supper** **July 28, after breakfast**	
Registration Fee:	Single persons:	U.S.$ 25.00
	Married couples	U.S.$ 30.00

No registration fee for young people up to 18 years of age.
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	Children (from 3 to 12 years)	**U.S.$ 60.00**

EAST COAST

Place:	Alfred University – Alfred, New York	
Date:	**August 5, after supper** **August 11, after breakfast**	
Registration Fee:	Single persons	U.S.$ 25.00
	Married couples	U.S.$ 30.00

No registration fee for young people up to 18 years of age.
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	Adults	**U.S.$120.00**
	Children (from 3 to 12 years)	**U.S.$ 60.00**

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Kew Gardens, NY 11415